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DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

POLICIES AND PERSONALITIES IN THE SOVIET POLITBURO

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
19 September 1968

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Policies and Personalities in the Soviet Politburo

Summary

For four years the Soviet collective leadership has evaded or postponed most of the really tough policy decisions, partly by design and partly because of the indecisive nature of the collective "personality." The invasion of Czechoslovakia almost certainly will exacerbate long-accumulating personal antagonisms and unsolved problems and put a severe strain on the regime's internal stability. The strenuous effort to involve all Politburo members in the decision to invade and in the subsequent "negotiations" with the Czechoslovak leadership suggests a recognition of the potential divisiveness of the issue and an attempt by the architects of invasion to create at least a unity of responsibility.

Factors favoring change, in any case, were present prior to the invasion. A significant number of the Politburo members, including Brezhnev, have made their careers in the Ukraine and have

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maintained meaningful political ties. Cutting across these regional connections, however, are considerations of age differences and shared outlooks in the approach to key policy problems. In recent years a gap has begun to open in the upper echelons of the hierarchy between the "juniors," with their unfulfilled ambitions, and the "seniors," who more and more have taken decisions on their own. Kosygin apart, most of the "seniors" have also presented an image of thoroughly conventional Soviet Communists, while the "juniors" have in common a generally more pragmatic approach to problems confronting the USSR.

Despite these cross-currents, the collective has survived since Khrushchev's ouster without major changes in its composition or manner of operation. No single leader has had the combination of desire and political strength to dominate. Brezhnev apparently has been willing to work within the system of shared power, carefully treating his associates with tact. Kosygin and Suslov play indispensable roles but have remained aloof from party organizational work and thus represent no direct threat to Brezhnev's pre-eminent position. Podgorny is hampered from bidding for the top party post by his assignment to the largely ceremonial post of president [redacted]

[redacted] Shelepin--the one young leader who seemed to possess the qualifications for the job--has been politically isolated since his apparent bid to topple the old guard in 1965. In addition, continuity and orthodoxy have been favored by the mix of vested interests represented on the Politburo.

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There are, however, some small signs of fluidity on personal relationships among the policy-makers in the aftermath of the intervention. If a shift in political alignments has occurred or is developing, the first major shakeup in the collective could occur as domestic problems, and particularly the touchy issue of allocations, come to a head.

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Foreword

It was inevitable that rumors concerning the impact of Czechoslovakia on the Soviet leadership would appear soon after the invasion, given the magnitude of the act and the widely held view that the unity of the leadership is not such as to enable it to withstand serious contention. Before long these rumors, together with various other portents, will become the stuff of Kremlinological conjecture that invariably flourishes when solid information is lacking. What emerges from this process will not be wholly reliable; neither should it be entirely discounted, if, as we believe, the tensions generated by the Czechoslovak issue are likely to linger and to exacerbate other conflicts that have accumulated during the four years of collective leadership.

While there is now no firm basis for forecasting the outcome of this political contest, when and in what form it will erupt, and who the winners and losers might be, there is little doubt that a contest is in progress. We think it possible, moreover, to identify, at least in a rough way, the framework of political relationships within which the contest will be conducted, the names of some of the chief contestants, and the political instruments that will figure in the action. This is what will be attempted in the paragraphs which follow.

The Political Framework

1. The 11-man Soviet Politburo is composed of overlapping and sometimes shifting cliques based on regional associations, age, and shared outlooks in the approach to key policy problems. Since the replacement of Khrushchev, this group has given the USSR a generally safe and thoroughly undynamic leadership. Before the invasion of Czechoslovakia, it had, partly by design and partly because of the nature of the collective "personality," managed to evade or postpone most important decisions affecting both domestic and foreign policy. The reward

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for this has been a high degree of internal stability within the collective; the cost has been an accumulation of personal antagonisms and unsolved problems, which the Czechoslovak issue seems certain to exacerbate. Even though the fabric of unity may have sufficient strength to see the collective through the immediate aftermath of Czechoslovakia, it has probably been permanently weakened by that event. Factors favoring change were, in any event, already present.

2. One fairly central element for the past three years has been the "Ukrainian group," headed by Brezhnev and including Podgorny, Kirilenko, Polyansky, and Shelest. (See Appendix for list of Politburo members). Although several of these men are in fact Great Russian by birth, all made their earlier careers in the Ukraine and have maintained meaningful political ties both among themselves and with that republic's organization. A similar "geographic" tie may exist between Suslov, who under Stalin had at one point the duty of overseeing the incorporation of the Baltic countries into the USSR, and late-comer to the Politburo (1966) Arvid Pelshe, a colorless Latvian party functionary. Pelshe began his rise in the Latvian party during Suslov's pro-consulship of that area and [redacted] owe his present high position to Suslov's patronage.

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3. There are no visible alignments based on geographic ties in the careers of the other important members of the Politburo. Kosygin is from Leningrad but has no visible power base there; Mazurov is a Belorussian by birth and largely made his career in that republic. Shelepin is a Great Russian who has made his way up the ladder through several central institutions rather than via provincial posts, and Voronov is a Russian who has served and established influence primarily in the Russian Republic.

4. As time has passed in the post-Stalin era, a gap has begun to open up in the upper echelons of the hierarchy between the "seniors"--all

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over 60--and the "juniors" in their early 50's who have been consulted less and less and on occasion have voiced resentment. The decline in the political fortunes of Shelepin, the most visible of these "juniors," has dramatized the gap. The potential divisiveness of this difference in age is heightened by the fact that many of the "juniors" have in common not only unfulfilled ambition, but also an approach to the problems confronting the USSR which tends to be more pragmatic than doctrinaire. Kosygin apart, most of the "seniors" now present an image of thoroughly conventional Soviet Communists. Their view of the world and their political vocabulary--formed during the Stalin years--have preserved heavy traces of the "siege" mentality of those years. "Imperialist encirclement" and the contagion of foreign ideas are for them real dangers, only slightly mitigated by the fact that the Soviet Union has greatly reduced its international isolation. Safety lies in defense of the established ways--primacy of the party and strict protection of State doctrine. Rejuvenation of the domestic economy is secondary when the "siege" instinct takes hold, to the demands of heavy industry and defense. Preservation of the system and the survival of the ruling group are paramount needs, and unorthodoxy, which might be tolerable in less dangerous times, is taken to be heresy.

5. There is bound to be some oversimplification in any such broad outline. There are naturally varying degrees of conformity to this pattern within the senior group, and the attitudes of individuals on particular issues is certain to alter with time, place, and the nature of the issue. Brezhnev himself, during his years under Khrushchev, stood out as something of a moderate by contrast to the more hard-line Kozlov, now dead, and he still seems more comfortable politically when on the "middle ground," even while his attitude is predominantly conservative. Podgorny has at times expressed support for economic decentralization, and Soviet intellectuals once considered him mildly sympathetic. Since 1966, however, he has followed

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Brezhnev's lead closely, and he [redacted] played a very hard-line role in the Czechoslovak crisis. To a lesser degree, the same thing is true of Kirilenko, who in the 1964-5 shakedown period showed an awareness of economic considerations which declined as Brezhnev's position became more conservative. Suslov, though ideologist-in-chief, has, on occasion, revealed himself to have somewhat more political flexibility than his reputation would suggest. Shelest, as regional party boss of the Ukraine, has presided over a limited "Ukrainization" of the economic and cultural life of the republic, but there is little evidence that he is sympathetic to other forms of change. Thus, the elder group, as a whole, radiates a strongly orthodox image.

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6. Kosygin and the "juniors"--Mazurov, Polyansky, Shelepin, and Voronov--appear to share a generally more pragmatic approach, perhaps not entirely accidentally, since they hold or have held positions in the state apparatus responsible for the execution of policy. For them, probably the danger of contamination by the West is weighed against what can be achieved by a degree of cooperation--both in terms of relaxed budgetary pressures and access to technological expertise. Domestically, party primacy is one thing, but economic efficiency and technological sophistication may be a slightly different thing. Although Polyansky and Shelepin are ardent Soviet nationalists, with a tinge of chauvinism and anti-Americanism about them, even they seem to believe that new methods of running the Soviet Union are needed and that more weight must be given to the "experts" whose contribution lies in technical knowledge, not Marxist-Leninist fervor. Polyansky, despite his Ukrainian background, fits this technocratic pattern more than the old orthodoxy, as do Mazurov and Shelepin. Voronov, slightly older than the others, makes few speeches and rarely figures in any reports on the attitudes of the leaders. Nevertheless, there have been scattered hints that in the right political climate he would be ready to join in a search for "new methods of administration."

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7. Despite these cross-currents, the collective has survived for four years without major changes in its composition or in the way in which it functions. This is due partly to political accident: no single leader has had the combination of desire and political strength necessary for domination. The younger members with ambition and vigor have, in turn, been kept in the background.

8. Brezhnev has managed to place a number of his associates in key party and government posts at lower levels, but he has apparently been willing to work within the system of shared power and has been careful to treat his associates with tact and to heed the views of others. Kosygin has proved a competent premier and is widely respected in both government and party circles for this competence, but he does not seem to have either the background in party work or the desire to step into the top party position. Suslov, too, plays an indispensable role in his own way and has considerable influence, particularly on matters of Communist faith and morals, but has seemed to remain largely aloof from party organizational work. Podgorny may harbor ambitions, but he is hampered by his assignment to the largely ceremonial post of president

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9. Among the younger members of the Politburo, the one man who seemed to have the necessary combination of opportunity, ambition, and leadership qualifications--Shelepin--apparently did make a bid to topple the old guard in 1965. His failure left him politically isolated, and several of his highly placed protégés have since been removed from their positions. Polyansky is ambitious but thus far has apparently remained loyal to Brezhnev. Mazurov has proved his abilities in both party and government, but with his exclusively Belorussian roots, he has little independent political strength. Voronov, despite his long tenure in the top leadership, remains a relatively shadowy figure.

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Interest Groups

10. The current composition of the Politburo closely reflects the power relationships among the major interest groups in the country. The party apparatus, government bureaucracy, agricultural interests, and the military-defense industry complex all seem to have men on the Politburo whom they can count on to be attentive to their concerns. This factor has favored both continuity and orthodoxy. When imposed on a mixture of orthodox and pragmatic outlooks, it has meant also consensus politics. The 1965 economic reform, which attempted simultaneously to recentralize and to decentralize decision-making in the economy, represented the interests of both the orthodox and the pragmatists, and the effect on the economy has been minimal. Until mid-August the leadership's handling of the Czechoslovak problem revealed the same conflicting elements--threats on a rising scale punctuated by personal meetings which tended to defuse the threats..

11. The final decision to intervene militarily was reached only after prolonged debate. The moving force seems to have been the Ukrainian group--Brezhnev, Podgorny, Shelest, and probably Kirilenko and Polyansky--whose concern was reportedly magnified by the fear of Soviet regional party officials that the infection of liberalization from Eastern Europe threatened their control at home.

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12. The military's orientation is uncertain. Both Brezhnev and Shelepin are alleged to draw support from undefined elements of the military. One of the anomalies of the Czechoslovak crisis was [redacted] that Marshal Grechko personally had opposed military intervention but that "the military" had pushed for it. [redacted]

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13. The Central Committee itself, whose 346 full and candidate members represent the most important elements of Soviet society, embodies a "national will" of sorts. This body will have to ratify any important changes in the leadership. Khrushchev's antagonists failed to gain its approval when they tried to oust him in 1957, but another group obtained it in 1964. The present Central Committee, elected in 1966, does not belong to any one man but rather reflects in its membership the degree to which power has been shared, in varying degrees, among the various members of the collective leadership. Regional party officials make up approximately 35 percent of its membership. Intellectuals of any sort, and particularly those with any degree of creativity or sympathy for liberal causes, are woefully underrepresented. The military-industrial complex has been allocated approximately 15 percent of the seats; enterprise managers, economists, and government officials engaged in the nondefense sectors hold a considerably smaller number of seats. Most of the national minorities are underrepresented; only the Ukraine, Belorussia, and Kazakhstan enjoy what might be termed proportional representation. The ages and career interests of the members of the present Central Committee suggest that on the whole their views are close to those of the

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"seniors" on the Politburo. They are probably conservative in matters of national security and resistant to change, but they would be vulnerable to manipulation on allocations questions that directly affect their own vested interests.

Fodder for Future Conflicts

14. If a shift in political alignments did occur under the pressure of the decision on Czechoslovakia, the first fissures in the collective leadership could well appear when it again turns its attention to outstanding problems at home, in particular the contentious issue of allocations, now further complicated by the unforeseen expenses of the invasion and its aftermath. Last year, before the Czechoslovak problem began to dominate the leaders' time and energy, the most conspicuous source of contention within the leadership was the question of capital investments in agriculture. Polyansky, with a strong vested interest in promoting increased investment in this sector, protested publicly against pressure for a cutback in these allocations. When reduced investment goals for agriculture were announced last fall, Polyansky again broke ranks and published an unprecedented major defense of the original goals in the Central Committee journal, Kommunist.

15. In the aftermath of the invasion, there are some small signs of a recasting of the balance within the Politburo. A strenuous effort was made to involve all the members of the Politburo, not only in the decision to invade, but in the week of "negotiation" with the Czechoslovak leadership which followed. Despite this effort to achieve collectivity, [redacted] that Shelepin, for one, still has reservations on broad questions of policy and may be trying to break out of his political isolation. At the same time an offsetting portent was the appearance this week, in a popular weekly magazine, of an article urging journalists and historians to write about the

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exploits of the 18th Army in the Great Patriotic War, with particular reference to the important role played by "Col. Brezhnev." This article is a sharp break with the pattern of minimal personal publicity for individual leaders that has been established since Khrushchev's ouster. It may be intended to underline Brezhnev's ties to and support from the military, but it may also indicate that his supporters are sufficiently uneasy to resort once again to the dangerous game of the "cult of personality."

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APPENDIX

Politburo Members

Leonid Brezhnev: age 61, General Secretary of CPSU Central Committee. Russian by birth, but began his career in and retains an identification with Dnepropetrovsk in the Ukraine. Orthodox in outlook; his political priorities are protection of the supremacy of the party, tightening the ties of the socialist camp, protection of defense goals through allocations to heavy industry, with agricultural allocations ranking second.

Aleksey Kosygin: age 64, Chairman of USSR Council of Ministers. Russian, born in Leningrad but has worked in the center in the state apparatus since 1939. Pragmatic with a strong interest in a balanced economy, especially interested in increased attention to consumer goods and "rationalization" of economic planning methods.

Nikolay Podgorny: age 65, Chairman of Presidium USSR Supreme Soviet. Ukrainian by birth and career, with identifiable ties to Kharkov in the Ukraine. Under Khrushchev, identified with relatively liberal views, but since early 1966 has moved steadily toward orthodoxy in support of Brezhnev.

Mikhail Suslov: age 65, Secretary of CPSU Central Committee with informal ranking of second-in-command, high priest in doctrinal matters with special interest in the cohesion of international Communism. Orthodox in outlook, opposed to "revisionism" in any field. Has shown an acute sensitivity to shifting political tides evidenced by his 20-year record on the Secretariat.

Andrey Kirilenko: age 62, Secretary of CPSU Central Committee. Ukrainian by birth and in career, having followed Brezhnev up the ladder from Dnepropetrovsk. Alternates with Suslov in deputizing for Brezhnev when the latter is out of town.

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Kirill Mazurov: age 54, First Deputy Chairman of USSR Council of Ministers. Belorussian by birth and career, retains ties through his former deputy, Petr Masherov, who succeeded him as head of the Belorussian party organization. Pragmatic in outlook, responsible for industry as First Deputy Premier, but also interested in agriculture through the rural reconstruction plan being strongly pushed by the Belorussian party organization. Was a strong proponent of the rationalization aspects of the economic reform. Alternates with Polyansky in deputizing for Kosygin.

Arvid Pelshe: age 69, Chairman of Party Control Commission. Latvian by birth and career, may have career ties to Suslov. Orthodox in outlook, [REDACTED]

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Dmitry Polyansky: age 50, First Deputy Chairman of USSR Council of Ministers. Ukrainian by birth, career ties to the Crimea and thus far a loyal member of the Ukrainian group in the Politburo. Has served in both party and state positions. As First Deputy Premier is responsible for agricultural production, and is a zealous champion of investment in the agricultural production base.

Aleksandr Shelepin: age 50, Chairman of All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions. Russian, made his career in the Komsomol, then as head of the KGB. Has ties with individuals in party and state positions through career associations, but does not have any particular geographic base. May also draw support from within the military.

Petr Shelest: age 60, Ukrainian by birth and career, still based in Kiev. First Secretary of Ukrainian Central Committee. Reportedly owes his rise to Khrushchev rather than to either Brezhnev or Podgorny, orthodox in outlook.

Gennady Voronov: age 58. Russian by birth and career. Chairman of RSFSR Council of Ministers. Ambiguous figure, tending toward pragmatism in outlook.

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